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**STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD  
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Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications  
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***The National Preparedness Report: Assessing the State of Preparedness***

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**Introduction**

Chairman Bilirakis, Representative Richardson, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee; thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today on behalf of the National Emergency Management Association (NEMA). NEMA represents the state emergency management directors of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Territories.

One of the most significant challenges facing state and local emergency management and homeland security officials is assessing the effectiveness of preparedness. Are we doing the right things for the right outcome? Do our efforts before the disaster improve our actions during and after the disaster? Such measurement remains elusive due to the ever-changing nature of preparedness itself.

Congress and various administrations have instituted several programs to address preparedness. For example, the Emergency Management Performance Grant (EMPG) has built a strong state and local baseline capability of emergency management in this nation. The State Homeland Security Grant Program has enabled significant investment in equipment and capabilities.

We truly are a more prepared nation. From neighborhood communities through all levels of government, we have acquired resources, achieved collaboration, and built systems to mitigate, prevent, prepare for, and respond to natural hazards and terrorist threats.

Today, I will examine the evolution of preparedness in this nation, the engagement by state officials in this process, and the future direction of preparedness.

**The Evolution of Preparedness in This Nation**

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) released the National Preparedness Report earlier this year. The document was intended to be one of many reports to assess capabilities and help the nation set priorities in coming years. To fully understand the origins of the report, we must first review several seminal events that drove changes on how this country approaches preparedness from a federal, state, and local perspective.

Until the last decade, most preparedness efforts by the nation were backward facing. In other words, we prepared for the events and disasters of the past. We focused on improving our response to the last disaster. Unfortunately, neither nature nor humans are so cooperative as to follow this strategy. The repeated lesson learned is great uncertainty in how, when, and where disasters strike and with what sophistication criminals and terrorists plan, practice, and conduct their attacks.

After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, it became a national priority to create and sustain the ability of state and local governments to prevent and respond to a broad range of severe homeland security events. Much like the events of 60 years earlier at Pearl Harbor, September 11 identified gaps in our approach to awareness of what is going on and how we prepared for future disasters or attacks. September 11 also challenged all our assumptions about preparedness. The focus of many new federal programs was to avoid another surprise by building the necessary capabilities to prevent incidents when possible and respond appropriately when the next event occurs.

The terrorist attacks of 2001 and anthrax attacks later the same year brought “Homeland Security” from theory into practice. It also forced the reexamination of preparedness. The nation began a transformation in our approach to preparedness – from reaction to discipline. Our goal was not a discipline which is rigid and bureaucratic; but rather a discipline enabling us to turn swiftly to a new adversary, recognize an evolving hazard, and confront an emerging threat. Two years later, then President Bush issued *Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD) 8: National Preparedness*. This document strengthened preparedness by articulating a clear and definable goal, and established mechanisms to improve preparedness and strengthen capabilities. Unfortunately, HSPD-8 overlooked one key aspect of preparedness - the natural disaster.

In 2005, Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast and demonstrated a clear lack of preparedness for a catastrophic event at practically every level of government. In the aftermath of the storm, Congress passed the *Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act (PKEMRA)*. Among its many elements, this legislation required states to submit an annual State Preparedness Report to FEMA. The most recent report submission occurred at the end of last year.

Finally, last year the President signed *Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) 8: National Preparedness*, which replaced HSPD-8. PPD-8 called for several new elements, including a National Preparedness Goal and a National Preparedness Report. This report, published on March 30, 2012, was partially built by integrating data from the State Preparedness Reports. PPD-8 has not yet been fully implemented or institutionalized. The supporting frameworks are still being refined and must be integrated with each other and within the entire preparedness system.

### **Connection between the National and the State Reports**

We consider the initial National Preparedness Report as transitional. There is no solid linkage yet between the analysis of threats and hazards at the state and local level and the broad assessment of preparedness across the entire nation. In assessing preparedness, we must not start at the end but at the beginning. The key element for successful integration is the threat, hazard identification, and risk assessment or “THIRA.” This tool has potential for being the analytical foundation for understanding and setting priorities. The THIRA should be the means by which we document how the system operates, what can go wrong, a means to identify potential consequences, and how best to address gaps. By their very nature, all threats and hazards are variable. There is no single descriptor of hurricane or of an improvised explosive device. The THIRA enables a problem solving approach to preparedness. For example, a county with a variable flood hazard may partner with a neighboring county to meet its sheltering needs for a local flood. But if the partner county faces the same hazard, shelters may remain unavailable for use requiring a broader, regional, or state solution.

Preparedness is about priorities. There is an old saying that a ship in harbor is safe but does not represent why we build ships. This nation must seek and achieve the balance of actions toward preparedness to enhance our economy and not create burdens. The removal of such encumbrances will enable the continued movement of goods and people without undue restrictions and ensure the continued provision of essential services under all conditions.

Our examination of preparedness must not be abstract, but rather form the basis for action. FEMA should improve these reports to enable a greater return on investment to the states and the local governments. The value should be placed on local decision-making as much as on national assessment. First, states must fully integrate Core Capabilities into their planning, analysis, and organizations. Even though FEMA did not require states to address all the Core Capabilities in the latest report the states seek to integrate them thoughtfully and systematically.

According to a July 2011 report completed by NEMA, “In fiscal year 2010, states addressed anywhere from one to 25 of these national priorities for each investment. The capabilities most often addressed included Planning, Communications, Community Preparedness and Participation, Critical Infrastructure Protection, and On-Site Incident Management. Whether a small or large expenditure, or a project impacting multiple or just a few capabilities, each of the National Capabilities found representation in at least one justification throughout the country.”

FEMA should increase its collaboration on the implementation of the National Preparedness System. Within the states stand countless examples of innovation in methods, approaches, and products. Considerable sharing of these innovations can be found across the states. The emphasis should be on achieving the ability to prepare for and respond to events of extreme complexity based either on size, duration, consequences, or concurrent or remote events. FEMA’s approach of the “maximum of maximums” is an interesting thought experiment; however, every claimed maximum can be surpassed and is by definition a compromise.

The National Preparedness Report should be based on realistic analysis valuing qualitative as well as quantitative values. The knowledge base of threats and hazards, levels of preparedness, and how to address gaps is best identified by including the broadest possible stakeholder base. But the nation is not well served by any reductionist analysis based on a “GREEN, YELLOW, RED” coding or by assigning a value of “one through five” when attempting to manage highly complex and inter-related issues.

Overall, states agree with some of the findings of the National Preparedness Report. For example, federal preparedness assistance grants have certainly helped build and enhance state, local, tribal, and territorial capabilities throughout multi-year investment. The entire systems could be improved, however, if the existing disjointed preparedness system could be revamped.

### **Moving Preparedness Forward**

Besides these specific suggestions, overall preparedness in this nation can be greatly enhanced by systemic changes in how the federal government supports preparedness functions at the state and local levels. Earlier this year, NEMA released the *Proposal for a Comprehensive Preparedness Grants Structure*. This proposal looks at preparedness grant funding holistically and brings state, local, and national priorities into alignment with one another.

The current grants structure is complex and often contradictory. This creates unintended inefficiencies in investments and duplication of efforts. The current and continuing fiscal condition of our nation requires us to invest every dollar more wisely than ever before. We want to gain efficiencies in our grants in order to increase the effectiveness of our mission. Within a grants system based on “flexibility with accountability,” the states, local governments, and the disciplines charged with our safety and security are capable of insight leading to ideas, innovation guiding investment, and a system of sharing which ensures we improve both our efficiency and effectiveness.

We must integrate our efforts to improve agility in confronting threats to the homeland, whether they are natural, technological, or manmade. This nation must effectively build strengths and capabilities against

a range of threats, reduce the consequences of many hazards, and thus reduce the risks to our communities.

From the purchase of basic equipment to such citizen involvement campaigns as “See Something, Say Something,” and from procuring major communications systems to improving the way state and local governments share information, these programs have continued a national effort toward better safeguarding and securing our communities. State and local governments use these essential programs to support our neighborhoods across a range of government programs, faith-based initiatives, regional collaborations, and personal preparedness efforts.

The Department of Homeland Security does not stand alone in this effort. Many other federal agencies also oversee hundreds of preparedness programs, from the Department of Health and Human Services to the Department of Education. All programs provide a level of confidence in the “system” so when a major event does occur the citizens of this country remain confident the whole of government and community has the skills, resources, and knowledge to effectively save lives and protect property.

In these tough economic times, the federal government does not bear the burden of securing our homeland alone. Billions of state and local funds are also invested in homeland security activities. Even citizens all across America—some barely able to afford the expense—supply themselves with preparedness kits to contribute to this truly national effort.

### **Mitigation as a Function of Preparedness**

Emergency management organizations at the federal and state levels often are structured more for execution than for planning. We separate the major functions of the profession such as preparedness, protection, mitigation, response, and recovery into easily managed directorates; however, an increasing reliance on the overlap occurs between them naturally. While preparedness and mitigation activities can differ in their mission and execution, the natural similarities provide the emergency management community with opportunities to leverage resources and expertise.

Mr. David Miller, Associate Administrator of the Federal Insurance and Mitigation Administration (FIMA) at FEMA is often quoted as saying, “Mitigation is the thread that permeates the fabric of national preparedness.” This sentiment is echoed in the working draft of the National Mitigation Framework. Since FEMA and its partners began the process of developing frameworks under PPD-8, it has become very clear that mitigation cannot exist in a vacuum. Mitigation benefits from the whole community approach to disaster preparedness and supports the other four mission areas of PPD-8. Frameworks and preparedness goals cannot be truly representative or actionable if they promulgate stovepipes. The proliferation of preparedness must be achieved by embracing the unique elements of each mission while understanding and building off of their shared goal of resiliency and sustainability.

While the federal programs geared towards mitigation are crucial to the success of many activities around the country, many states have committed millions of dollars to building their own mitigation capabilities and leveraging limited resources to accomplish independent preparedness goals. NEMA has always supported mitigation and its critical role in the cycle of preparedness and continues to encourage investments in mitigation activities at the state level.

Resilient communities are those that take proactive measures to protect investments made across the full range of infrastructure. Many of the messages of preparedness are geared towards dealing with or managing the effects of disasters, but mitigation takes preparedness a step further. The actions taken under the name of mitigation reduce the impact of the disaster before it happens and can be used to rebuild an affected area in a more resilient manner. While neither community members nor emergency managers can stop the next disaster from occurring, every member of the community can play an active role in lessening the consequences from those disasters in the future.

## Conclusion

The states believe the often-mentioned need to “measure preparedness” is being realized all across the country. The commitment made by Congress, state and local governments, and Main Street Americans continues each day amidst constantly evolving threats and hazards ...certainly a measured change from the mindset of September 10, 2001.

The National Preparedness System must take the longer view and not the bureaucratic lowest common denominator where the only issue addressed is the one currently under consideration. Our view must be extended from being focused on the current budget or the latest grant cycle to the distant horizon. The National Preparedness Report should contribute to an understanding of what we need to accomplish. Such a document, however, is not the final word or sole measure of our efforts.

Preparedness is an objective rather than a destination. A condition of perfect preparedness cannot be achieved but this should not deter us from our mission to try. No single report will complete this critical mission. The National Preparedness System holds the potential of drawing down risks to the nation and its vital interests. Accomplishing such reductions in risk is the true business of the homeland security and emergency management enterprise of our nation.

In our *Proposal for a Comprehensive Preparedness Grants Structure*, NEMA stated our fundamental principles and values. One is very relevant to this discussion on the National Preparedness Report. “Build and sustain a skilled cadre across the nation that is well organized, rigorously trained, vigorously exercised, properly equipped, prepared for all hazards focused on core capabilities, and resources for both the most serious and most likely threats and hazards.”

These are the hallmarks of a prepared nation. This are what we should measure.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today and look forward to your questions.